

What is the community challenge?

Millions of young adults aged 18-24 across the U.S. (including more than 30,000 who are out of work and school in Philadelphia) lack access to higher education and careers that provide them with a living wage. At the same time, U.S. businesses are calling for more and better-trained talent to compete on the global stage, but there will not be enough skilled workers to meet that demand.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Year Up Professional Training Corps

Grantee: Greenlight Fund

Subgrantee: Year Up

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Young Adults aged 18-24 designated "Opportunity Youth"

Communities Served: This study focuses primarily on Philadelphia, PA, and uses data from New York City, and Jacksonville, Florida sites for added perspective.

What is the promising solution?

Year Up targets economically disadvantaged young adults aged 18-24. The program recruits young adults (termed "opportunity youth") who are partially or completely disconnected from school and work or judged to be at risk of disconnection. Year Up's Professional Training Corps (PTC) programs target young adults with a high school degree or equivalent, who can be accepted and enrolled at the college partner, and whose personal challenges are judged to be manageable with the level of assistance the PTC programs provide. Year Up Professional Training Corps (PTC) Program focuses on implementation of a more cost-effective variant of the traditional Year Up design, through co-location and dual-enrollment of Year Up students at a college partner site. The program provides six months of intensive instruction based on readying young adults for high-demand employment opportunities. It continues with a six-month internship involving continued instruction and individualized coaching and community support throughout the year. During this study, the PTC services were expanded to include the following alternative strategies: (1) site-tailored methods for systematically gathering enhanced information on how participants are doing in their college courses; (2) systematic sharing and use of this information to inform and provide more academically-focused coaching to participants by staff; and (3) greater access to and better use of resources to assist participants who are struggling with their courses.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Year Up's PTC by Abt Associates began in 2014 and finished reporting in 2018. It included an implementation evaluation and an impact study focused on improving participant outcomes and fiscal sustainability.. The impact study was a randomized controlled trial of the alternative strategies at three Year Up PTC locations. It tested whether the Alternative Strategies Group (treatment), who received more structured and academically-oriented interactions with and support from Year Up coaches, had better retention in the Learning and Development (L&D) phase (first six months of the PTC program when students are enrolled in college courses), and longer college enrollment than the Usual Strategies Group (control), who did not receive assistance beyond the usual Year Up PTC program activities.

What did the evaluation find?

The Alternative Strategies Group received more structured and academically-oriented interactions and support from their coaches, and several promising findings developed during Cycle 2 of the study:

- The proportion of participants completing the PTC program’s six-month L&D phase for those randomly assigned to the Alternative Strategies Group was significantly higher as compared with those assigned to the control group. Specifically, there was a statistically significant 14.3 percent difference in the means between the two groups ($p=.036$).
- The Alternative Strategies Group was significantly more likely to continue enrollment in college in the first month following completion of L&D than the control group. Specifically, there was a statistically significant 19.9 percent difference in the means between the two groups ($p=.002$).
- During the seven months following enrollment in the program, the Alternative Strategies Group stayed enrolled in college significantly longer than the control group. Specifically, individuals in the Alternative Strategies Group stayed enrolled in college for an average of 0.77 months longer than control participants ($p=.001$).

How is Year Up using the evaluation findings to improve?

Since the completion of this study, Year Up has adapted and packaged the coaching resources tested with the Alternative Strategies Group during the impact study period for a wider Year Up audience. The resulting coaching guide has been shared with staff at all 26 Year Up sites nationwide for implementation and ongoing monitoring and feedback in 2019. The implementation study in Philadelphia revealed challenges with admissions, retention, and the diversity and location of internship partnerships. The impact study directly addressed one of these challenges—retention. Nationally, Year Up has moved to a regionalized management structure to address admissions challenges and created a shared contact center for centralized communication with prospective applicants. A key focus has been, and will continue to be moving forward, expansion of Year Up’s employer partner network to provide more fully-paid internships that are located on public transit routes.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact evaluation

Study Population: Students, aged 18-24 designated as “Opportunity Youth”

Independent Evaluator: Abt Associates

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence*:
Moderate

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.